DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 252 066 FL 014 718

AUTHOR Fuhriman, Jay
TITLE When They Don't Speak English, How Do We Educate?
PUB DATE May 83
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the National School Boards Association (San Francisco, CA, April 23-26, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingual Education; *Classroom Techniques; *Educational Objectives; *Educational Strategies; English (Second Language); Second Language Instruction; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Bilingual education is a method, not a program, used by the teacher so that the student is receiving instruction in both English and the native language. All instruction is given with an appreciation for the cultural heritage of all children in American society. The purpose of bilingual education is to improve the child's English language skills so he or she is fluent and independent in the English language. Bilingual education is not the same as English as a second language (ESL). ESL is not a method, but a component of the total educational program. It is a course with specific content, like math or science, with concepts and skills to be learned. It is a false assumption that all immigrants successfully learn English, since it is not until the fourth or fifth generation that English is the dominant language. The schools must be allowed to do their job in assisting all non-English-proficient students to become proficient in the language of American Society and must be allowed to use sound methods and approaches. The assumption that the purpose of bilingual education is to allow children to not learn English is mistaken. The exclusive purpose of bilingual education is to help students learn English as rapidly and efficiently as possible and, at the same time, to ensure that they do not fall behind in other subjects while learning English. (Author/MSE)

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WHEN THEY DON'T SPEAK ENGLISH, HOW DO WE EDUCATE?

Presentation by Dr. Jay Fuhriman,
Vice Chairman, Board of Trustees,
Nampa School District # 131
Nampa, Idaho

Clinic C-47, NSBA'83 - San Francisco, California

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ABSTRACT

This is a discussion from an educational standpoint on how best to educate children when they do not speak English. This is necessary because there are many influential people in our society who are grossly misinformed about Bilingual Education.

Those who are interested in education must know what Bilingual Education is, what it does, and how to implement a good bilingual approach in the classroom.

Bilingual Education is a method, not a program, used by the teacher so the student is receiving instruction in English and in the native language. It is learning the English language and the native language. All instruction is given with an appreciation for the cultural heritage of all children in American society. The purpose of Bilingual Education is to improve the child's English language skills so that the child is fluent and independent in the English language.

Bilingual Education is not the same as English as a Second Language. ESL is not a method, but is a component of the total educational program. It is a course with content like math or science. It has specified content with concepts and skills to be learned.

It is a false assumption that all immigrants successfully learn English, but rather it is not until the fourth or fifth generation before English is the dominant language. Let schools do their job in assisting all non-English proficient students to become proficient in the language of our society. Let us use good sound methods and approaches.

For anyone to say that the purpose of Bilingual Education is so that the children do not have to learn English is badly mistaken. Let us help the students in English so they do not fall behind in the rest of their subject while learning English.

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We are looking at this topic from a purely educational standpoint and not a political standpoint. We are not attempting to decide if it is right or wrong to teach a child in a language other than English because it may be un-American or may make the child a second class citizen. We are simply discussing, from an educational standpoint, how best to educate children when they do not speak English!

In today's world of advanced communications, it is increasingly easy for people to learn about what is going on around them. Information about all aspects of life, including education, is readily available to everyone. And, because of this abundance of information, it is easier than ever to learn only half of what is happening or what is true.

Regarding Bilingual Education, it is easy to learn what it is all about and it is just as easy to learn what it is not about. There is, however, no excuse for being ignorant about the purpose, and hence, the definition of bilingual education. Yet many important and influential people in our society are grossly misinformed about Bilingual Education.

A couple of years ago an article was carried in the local newspaper entitled Bilingual Baloney in which it states:

> "To encourage a student to retain a non-English language as his primary source of communication in the U.S. is to consign him to a permanent disadvantage" (Idaho Press-Tribune, 28 Sept., 1980)."

The author does not state specifically that Bilingual Education encourages a student to retain a non-English language as a primary source of communication, but, as stated in a follow-up letter, that is what he is inferring. What else could he have meant by including such a statement in an article entitled "Bilingual Baloney?"

In further clarifying his statement in a letter to a citizen, he states:

"I do not feel that school instruction in a non-English langauge is beneficial to the student. I think quite the contrary is true. Clinging to any other language as a primary educational source greatly reduces a person's chances for economic and other advantages" (letter to Claude Veagarie, 30 Sept. 1980).

In another article the writer recalls a conversation with a Harvard professor who claims that:

"....bilingual education is fracturing a fragile linguistic unity which has made it possible to build a nation from diverse tongues. Bilingual Education could doom us to possible dissolution of the Union" (Idaho Statesman, 11 Feb. 1981).

What is the professor from Harvard telling us when he says that "Bilingual Education is fracturing a fragile linguistic unity?" He is telling us the same thing that the previous author is saying: Bilingual Education is a program that teaches a child in his native language, so he will never have to learn English.

The editorial of another paper stated that:
"Bilingual Education discourages persons living in this nation from learning the most common language, English" (Idaho Press-Tribune, 10 May 1981).

Paul Harvey, the widely syndicated columnist, wrote that:
"Instead of helping minorities learn English, Bilingual Education is helping minorities remain minorities--unabsorbed, unable to speak the language of their adopted country. However well-intentioned Bilingual Education may be,it tends to inhibit a command of English; it retards full citizenship and restricts opportunity (Idaho Press-Tribune, 13 Dec. 1978)."

President Reagan, while addressing the National League of Cities, made the following comment:

"It is absolutely wrong to have a Bilingual Education program that is now, openly, admittedly, dedicated to preserving (the students) native language and never getting them adequate in English so they can go out into the job market and participate."(J-TESOL News Vol. VI. No. 1, Fall 1981, p.7.).

What do all of these comments have in common? They were all made by people (or newspapers) that enjoy considerable renown and exposure to the public, and they will perpetuate a false image of the purpose and accomplishments of Bilingual Education. They have described what Bilingual Education is not. Such erroneous declarations by influential people and newspapers can only serve to distort and confuse the public's understanding of the true nature and value of the bilingual approach to education.

As people interested in education we must know what Bilingual Education is all about. We must know what Bilingual Education does. We must be able to recognize a good bilingual approach to education, and we must be able to help design and implement a good bilingual approach and good bilingual laws when the opportunity presents itself.

First, let's turn to the federal law in our search for a definition of Bilingual Education. The 1978 Bilingual Education Act (Public Law 95-561, Nov. 1, 1978) defines the term program of "Bilingual Education" to mean:

"A program of instruction, designed for children of limited English proficiency...(where)....there is instruction given in, and study of, English, and to the extent necessary to allow a child to achieve competence in the English language, the native language of the children of limited English proficiency..." (Section 703. (a)(4)(A)(i)).

Interpreted, that says that instruction in the content areas is given in English, and the English language itself is studied by the child. And, to allow a child to achieve competence in the English language, instruction is also given in the child's native language, and the child's native language itself is also studied.

Section (B) states that:

> "The objective of the program shall be to assist children of limited Lnglish proficiency to improve their English language skills...(Ibid., (B))."

The law further states that the instruction given children of limited English proficiency is to be given with appreciation for the cultural heritage of such children and of other children in American society....

From the federal law, we can extrapolate the following definition of Bilingual Education:

> "Bilingual Education is receiving instruction in English and the native language, and it is learning the English language and the native language. All instruction is given with an appreciation for the cultural heritage of all children in American society.The purpose of Bilingual Education is to improve the child's English language skills."

Notice that this definition of Bilingual Education makes no mention of different types of Bilingual Education such as transitional or maintenance or developmental.

It would probably be appropriate to expand the definition of Bilingual Education in order to clarify it even more. Since its inception in modern times, Bilingual Education has been called a "program." Educational programs are generally seen as something that is apart and separate from everything else. They are self-sufficient and are carried on by themselves. For example, the "band program" is designed to take the participants to a particular room where they receive special instruction in band music and band instruments. The "reading program" is a certain portion of the day that is set aside to instruct children in the skills of reading. A basal reader or some other specialized text is used which is specifically designed to improve the children's reading abilities. The English as a Second Language program is a particular class that has its specific purpose--the teaching of English. Programs, then, are courses of study with content, like French, or mathematics, or earth science. Like all courses, programs have a specified content with concepts and skills to be learned.

Bilingual Education is not a program. It is not a course of study; it has no content. One does not learn Bilingual Education the way one learns math or

earth science. The definition of Bilingual Education should include that it is an approach to education, a way to organize a total curriculum, much as "the open classroom" or "elective courses" are ways to organize learning so as to present subject matter most effectively to students. (TESOL NEWSLETTER, Vol. X, No. 4, Sept. 1976).

In a regular classroom setting, we often hear a teacher announce to the students that it is "now spelling time, (or math time, or reading time) so will you put everything else away?" And, in schools with bilingual programs the teacher often announces that "now it is bilingual time," or that "it's time for the bilingual kids to go with Miss Gomez to their bilingual class." "Bilingual time" is all the time, from the moment the children arrive until they go home. Remember, Bilingual Education has no content, it is not a subject such a history, so how can it be "bilingual time?" Bilingual Education is an approach to education, not a "program" as we normally invision a program and it is not a "subject."

Bilingual Education should permeate the entire school atmosphere and transcend all subjects. The bilingual approach is when the teacher uses English and the child's native language when necessary to teach the social studies lesson, and she uses English and the child's native language to teach the math lesson, and the language arts lesson, and during "show and tell" and during recess and any other time when the child needs instruction or communication in both languages in order to learn.

As educators and lawmakers we need to encourage our schools to establish and implement a bilingual "approach" to education rather than a bilingual "program."

We should say a word about English as a Second Language. ESL is not an "approach" to education; it is a component of the total educational program. It is a course with content like French, or mathematics, or earth science. Like all courses, it has specified content with concepts and skills to be learned.

By English as a Second Language it is meant, "the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages." The recommended implementation of such

instruction includes: (A) incorporation of the cultural aspects of the students background into meaningful language learning experience; (B) teaching vocabulary and structures relevant to students' learning experiences; (C) application of ESL techniques to content areas taught through the second language (TESOL NEWSLETTER, Vol. X. NO. 4, Sept. 1976).

It should be obvious by now that the comments from influential people and newspaper editorials, that I mentioned earlier, display a significant amount of ignorance or lack of knowledge regarding Bilingual Education. Firstly, they all allude to the myth that Bilingual Education is designed to teach the child only in his native language and never teach him to speak English. That is false. Secondly, most suggest that Bilingual Education should be an English immersion program. An English immersion program is not a bilingual approach to education, rather it is an ESL program. It is obvious by the definitions provided in the federal law that, ultimately, the only purpose of Bilingual Education is to assist the child in becoming fluent and independent in the English language.

To conclude my remarks, let me again quote from a recent newspaper editorial:

> "It is unrealistic to think that a person just stepping off a boat or a plane should know and understand English. But it is not unrealistic to feel that given a reasonable amount of time a person shouldn't have mastered the native language enough to get by. For generations of immigrants that has been the case. They came to this country, learned the language and customs and melted into what has become the most advanced and prosperous society in the history of mankind (Idaho Press-Tribune, 10 May 1981)."

If we go back and study the history of migrating people and their language habits, we will find that this statement is incorrect. History points out that not too many first generation adult immigrants ever learn or learned the host language even as the editorial states, "enough to get by." Most (not all) immigrants settled into blocks or groups called enclaves, and cultivated their culture and especially their language. Usually the second generation didn't know English until they went to school. They became functionally bilingual. The first and most of the time, the second generations socialized in their native language

went to church in their native language, and most of their activities outside their employment were conducted in their native language. It was not until the third generation that they became bilinguals and began to really socialize in English, go to church in English, and conduct other activities outside their employment in English. The fourth generation became more passively bilingual, that is, being dominantly English speakers but learning enough of the native language to be able to carry on polite conversations with grandma and grandpa, friends of the family, etc. Usually by the fifth generation, they were basically monolingual English speakers (Current Trends in Linguistics, p. 529).

I hope we have learned three basic things today:

1. What Bilingual Education is;
2. What Bilingual Education is not;
3. What ESL is.

Let schools and Bilingual Education do their jobs in assisting all non-English proficient students to become proficient in the language of our society. But let us use good, sound methods and approaches. And remember, anyone who says that the purpose of Bilingual Education is so that the children do not have to learn English is badly mistaken. The exclusive purpose of Bilingual Education is to assist the students to learn English as rapidly and efficiently as possible, and also help them so they do not fall behind in the rest of their subjects while they are learning English.

Thank you.